

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

June 30, 2005

The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-232 The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker:

We write to you regarding reported threats by prominent members of the Republican House Conference of political retaliation against Major League Baseball if it chooses to sell the Washington Nationals franchise to an ownership consortium including financier George Soros. The threats appear to be based on Mr. Soros's political leanings.

These published threats, let alone such retribution were it to occur, constitute a dismaying example of the misuse of authority and abuse of political power that have become all too familiar. We call upon you, as Speaker, to give public assurances that no such inappropriate retaliatory action will occur, and to reproach members of your conference who made such public threats against the League.

House Ethics Rules prohibit Members from using their official power for partisan retaliation. The Committee on Standards of Official Conduct has prescribed that "House Members and staff are . . . prohibited from threatening punitive action on the basis of [campaign contributions or partisan affiliation]." <sup>1</sup> The Committee reiterated this restriction in 1999 in the wake of threats made by Rep. Tom DeLay (R-TX) as a part of his "K Street project." <sup>2</sup>

Major League Baseball, the current owner of the Washington Nationals, is entertaining bids from investors seeking to purchase the team. Many of the groups include prominent Republicans, such as former Secretary of State Colin Powell and former Nixon aide Fred Malek. One group led by Washington, DC businessman Jonathan Ledecky includes George Soros.

In a recent newspaper article, three Republican Members stated their displeasure with Mr. Soros's progressive leanings and appeared to threaten the League with punitive legislative

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. HOUSE COMM. ON STANDARDS OF OFFICIAL CONDUCT, CAMPAIGN BOOKLET.

<sup>2</sup>Memorandum from Comm. on Standards of Official Conduct to All Members, Officers, and Employees, *Prohibition Against Linking Official Actions to Partisan or Political Contributions, or Personal Gain* (May 11, 1999).

consequences should the team be sold to his ownership group.<sup>3</sup> For example, Rep. Tom Davis (R-VA), Chairman of the Government Reform Committee, stated:

I think Major League Baseball understands the stakes [of selling to Mr. Soros]. I don't think they want to get involved in a political fight. .... I don't think it's the Nats that get hurt. I think its Major League Baseball that gets hurt. They enjoy all sorts of exemptions [from the antitrust laws].<sup>4</sup>

Rep. John Sweeney (R-NY), Vice Chair of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Treasury, and Housing and Urban Development, the Judiciary, District of Columbia, stated, "If Soros buys the team and seeks public financing for the new stadium or anything else, the GOP attitude would be, 'Let him pay for it.'"<sup>5</sup> The *Washington Post* further reported that Rep. Sweeney stated, "It's not necessarily smart business sense to have anybody who is so polarizing in the political world. That goes for anybody, but especially as it relates to Major League Baseball because it's one of the few businesses that get incredibly special treatment from Congress and the federal government."<sup>6</sup> Another Republican Member, who not surprisingly asked to remain anonymous, reportedly told *Roll Call*, "Why would Major League Baseball want to get involved with George Soros?' . . . 'It's about more than just the sale price.'"<sup>7</sup>

The decision on team ownership has always rested squarely with Major League Baseball, not Congress, and it should continue to rest with the League and not Congress. Many owners of sports teams have been active in electoral politics; of course, President Bush was the co-owner of a professional baseball franchise at a time when his family was deeply involved in national politics.

If these statements are accurate as reported by *Roll Call* and other publications, they appear to constitute a serious violation of House Ethics Rules. In any event, we hope you would agree that applying a political litmus test such as this to private sales has no place in Congress.

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<sup>3</sup>Ben Pershing, *Republicans Warn MLB on Soros' Nats Bid*, ROLL CALL, June 27, 2005.

<sup>4</sup>*Id* (emphasis added).

<sup>5</sup>*Id*.

<sup>6</sup>*Soros's Nats Bid Irks Republicans*, WASH. POST, June 28, 2005, at E2.

<sup>7</sup>Pershing, *supra* note 2.

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We urge you to denounce these threats and convey to the Members that the legislative process should not be used as a tool for punitive partisan actions.

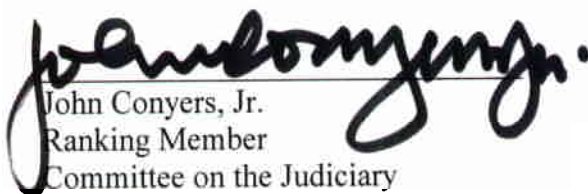
Sincerely,



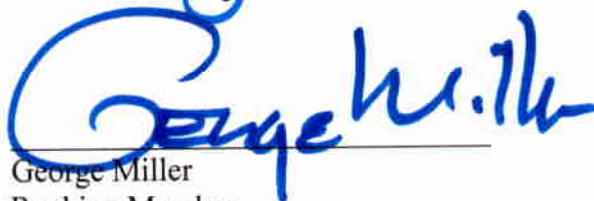
Nancy Pelosi  
Democratic Leader



Steny H. Hoyer  
Democratic Whip



John Conyers, Jr.  
Ranking Member  
Committee on the Judiciary



George Miller  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Education and the Workforce